

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: REACTION TO PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ON NORTHERN
IRELAND

REF: STATE 206896

1. PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT ON NORTHERN IRELAND (NI) DREW A WARM WELCOME FROM PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN. IN A DOWNING STREET STATEMENT ISSUED THE EVENING OF AUGUST 30, CALLAGHAN SAID, "I AM GLAD TO HAVE HIS SUPPORT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A GOVERNMENT THERE WHICH WILL COMMAND WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE THROUGHOUT BOTH PARTS OF THE COMMUNITY" AND WENT ON TO NOTE THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD DEMONSTRATED "REAL HUMAN CONCERN FOR THE PEOPLE OF NI AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE REALITIES OF THE SITUATION." DOWNING STREET SPOKESMEN ALSO ENDORSED THE PRESIDENT'S VIEW THAT THE PROBLEMS OF NI COULD ONLY BE SOLVED BY THE PEOPLE OF NI AND SAID THAT HMG WOULD MATCH THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITMENT TO SEEK WAYS TO STIMULATE JOB-CREATING INVESTMENT IN THE EVENT OF A SETTLEMENT.

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2. THE BRITISH PRESTIGE PRESS GAVE THE STATEMENT AND REACTION THERETO PROMINENT, THOUGH NOT LEAD, COVERAGE IN THEIR AUGUST 31 MORNING EDITIONS. THE TIMES CARRIED A STRAIGHTFORWARD REPORT ON THE FRONT PAGE WHICH INCLUDED THE FOLLOW-UP STATEMENTS OF WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY POWELL AND SENATOR KENNEDY. TIMES ALSO CARRIED PAGE FOUR ARTICLE ON REACTION IN ULSTER WHICH HAS APPARENTLY BEEN

MUTED AND NOT ADVERSE (BELFAST WILL REPORT FURTHER). GUARDIAN HAD A LARGE FRONT-PAGE STORY WHICH INCLUDED HMG AND GOI REACTIONS, AS WELL AS THOSE OF VARIOUS GROUPS IN BELFAST. GUARDIAN ALSO COMMENTED THAT "IN SPITE OF SURFACE ENTHUSIASM THERE WAS A TANGIBLE FEELING OF DISAPPOINTMENT IN LONDON ABOUT MR. CARTER'S MUCH-ADVERTISED INITIATIVE." THIS APPARENTLY REFLECTS IMPACT OF EXAGGERATED MEDIA REPORTING OF PAST FEW WEEKS. THE ONLY "DISAPPOINTMENT" WE HAVE NOTED IS WITHIN THE MEDIA. DAILY TELEGRAPH HEADLINED ITS FRONT-PAGE STORY "CARTER APPEALS FOR PEACE PACT IN ULSTER" AND STRESSED THE PRESIDENT'S REAFFIRMATION THAT U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WILL CONTINUE EFFORTS TO STEM THE FLOW OF IL-LICIT ARMS AND FUNDS FROM THE U.S. TO NI. OTHERWISE THE TELEGRAPH COVERED MUCH THE SAME GROUND AS THE OTHER REPORTS. THE TABLOIDS DID NOT GIVE THE STORY PROMINENT COVERAGE AND AS YET THERE HAS BEEN NO EDITORIAL COMMENT.

3. PARLIAMENTARY RECESS AND AUGUST HOLIDAYS PRECLUDE EXTENSIVE SOUNDING OF OPINION AMONG MPS AND OTHER POLITICAL LEADERS. ONE LABOR MP WITH WHOM WE SPOKE, HOWEVER, FELT THAT THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT MIGHT BE MARGINALLY HELPFUL IN NI, BUT JUDGED THAT IT WAS LARGELY DICTATED BY DOMESTIC U.S. PRESSURES. BEMUSED, HE ALSO NOTED THAT STATEMENT FAILED TO SATISFY SELF-GENERATED EXPECTATIONS OF THE MEDIA. WORKING LEVEL CONTACTS IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FCO AND NI OFFICE, WHO OF COURSE WERE PREVIOUSLY AWARE OF STATEMENT'S CONTENT, WERE PLEASED WITH REACTION THUS FAR, PARTICULARLY IN NI WHERE IT DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE STRUCK ANY LARGE SPARKS IN PROTESTANT COMMUNITY.

STREATOR

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